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MESSAGE TO THE CLASS

Ladies and Gentlemen of Rice 1942:

Almost exactly twenty-four hundred years ago, at about this season of the year and time of the morning, in the old, wooden amphitheatre, beside the rock of the Acropolis, and canopied only by the sunny, transparent sky of Athens, there was enacted for the first time, and in the presence of thousands of spectators, the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. That play has been characterized by competent critics as the highest achievement of the human mind, and by everyone who has read it as a great achievement of the human mind. Its opening scene was an innovation in dramatic art. A watchman, a common soldier, not to appear again in the play, exclaims: "O God! when will my toil end? Lying on the earth like a hound watching the nightly company of the stars, season after season, year after year, waiting for the signal, keeping myself awake with a song. . . . May God yet send us rest, and light the beacon flame of good news flashed across the night."

Like that sentinel in the *Agamemnon* we are all soldiers, every man and woman of us, soldiers today, whether as watchmen or workers: workers in munition factories, workers in shipyards, workers in transport, workers in assembly plants; watchmen on wings beyond the sky, watchmen on towers, watchmen on tanks, watchmen beneath the depths of the sea; watchmen and workers, morning, noon, and night,

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day in and day out, to win this war, finally and completely, in the name of justice, truth, and freedom.

But how about the other things you came here to do? When you came here in 1938 I urged you to start your work by looking further ahead. Your immediate object, I thought, was to begin to plan not only for four years, but for forty years on. The goal of the Rice Institute for you, I said, was to combine in the largest possible measure extensive liberal learning and intensive technical training. It was our hope, as it was the Founder's hope, that in your preparation here for long and useful lives hereafter, each of you would touch life at most of the many points of contact the Founder's bounty affords. How fully and successfully you have taken advantage of the opportunities offered, each of you knows better than I can know.

Of a few things, however, I am sure: you have grown in stature, knowledge, and outlook; you have held fast to the steadying influences of your upbringing alike in patriotism and in religion; you have found high ideals, motives, and standards, of morals and manners and mind; and you cling to principles of conscience and conduct, research and discovery, that defy the corrosion of time and change.

On the other hand, though many of you, indeed most of you, may have absorbed the first shock of recent stark realities which we had already begun to anticipate in the autumn of 1938, nevertheless all of you have been thrown into confusion of thinking by this sudden shattering of most of your prospects and at least the indefinite postponement of some of your most cherished plans.

But these things also I know: that the freedom we have given you to think and speak and argue and seek truth fortifies you to fight to the bitter end for the victory of freedom; that leaders in this conflict will rise from your own ranks,

chiefly, among other reasons, because you have taught yourselves to lead by first teaching yourselves to follow; that for the entire duration of the conflict, whatever its length, your rights of individual mastery you will renounce to the mandates of your country; that under its brave and resolute leadership you will resort to force of arms, first because you and your fathers have accepted and enjoyed for years the protection of your country, and second because the very existence of its institutions is challenged by aggressive force of enemies' arms. And I know that, loyally and cheerfully, you will stand to the last man and woman of you, even unto death, until the rights of all men to think, to work, to worship, and to serve their fellows be restored to humankind upon this planet.

If you have heard in your hearts what I have spoken out of great pride and faith in you, none the less you must still be asking poignantly What about the forty years on? If I have answered that question only indirectly and inadequately, here again the spirit and inspiration of this place may help you to an answer. Throughout these four years you have undergone growing pains, growing opinions, growing plans, growing convictions. I trust that throughout your lives, whether long or short, you will always be undergoing growing pains, growing opinions, growing plans, growing convictions. Even in these days, I believe that above the din and duress of battle, whether in factory or field, on sea, or land, or in the air, you will continue to think and plan for the future. You can no more stop thinking, even in such dire circumstances, than you can stop breathing. You will be planning, ever planning, that this awful business shall never recur; that by the blood of those of you who go down, and by the brains and brawn of those of you who return, the hard-won gains of the human spirit shall survive, the treasured

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seeds of that spirit shall take root once more, and truth and pity, kindness and generosity, justice and tolerance shall again flourish in the earth, to the glory of God, and through His grace, for the healing of men and nations.

One word more. To my mind it is singularly appropriate that the last words you carry away with you in imperishable memory from this temple of truth, of whose invisible spirit you yourselves are the visible presence, should have been borne on the voice yesterday and this morning of a minister of mercy, whose eloquence and wisdom have challenged, lifted, and re-enforced our determination to strive increasingly and unceasingly for a fairer, better, wiser, and brighter world for all God's creatures, all the sons and daughters of men, after this war.

Your predecessors from 1916 to 1941 we sent on their way under an ancient injunction twice used in the Iliads of Homer—the charge of Hippolochus to Glaucus, his son, the charge of Peleus to Achilles, his son. Even so today, with high hopes and all the solicitude of affection, we send you forth under that same Homeric rubic,

To be brave. To win renown,
To stand the first in worth as in command,
To add new honours to your native land,
Before your eyes your mighty sires to place,
And emulate the glories of our race,

and charge you of 1942, as at the training camp I charged your forerunners of 1917, in lines of the late Sir Henry Newbolt,

To set the Cause above renown,
To love the game beyond the prize,
To honour, while you strike him down,
The foe that comes with fearless eyes;
To count the life of battle good,
And dear the land that gave you birth,
And dearer yet the brotherhood
That binds the brave of all the earth.